

How a pastor built a multi-million dollar home

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CHARLOTTE, N.C. – In the beginning, Steven Furtick created Elevation Church. He started with 14 members. Eight years later, his congregation on a given weekend can top 14,000 members. In sermons, Furtick said he hopes to top 100,000 members in the future.

“He's a rock 'n roll star,” said Chris Rosebrough, who runs Pirate Christian Radio, a podcast. “He’s not a club band anymore. He’s a stadium band.”

Elevation Church has given more than \$10 million to charity, and hundreds of thousands of hours of volunteer work. Furtick himself is one part preacher, one part celebrity. He’s also his own brand, profiting from book sales and paid personal appearances around the world. The man who calls himself Pastor Steven has become more popular than the church he built, with four times as many followers on Twitter as Elevation Church itself.

Now, Steven Furtick is spending a lot of that money on a 16,000 square foot house in Weddington. It has 7 ½ bathrooms, according to building permits, which put the contract value of the house alone just shy of \$1.4 million. The land cost another \$325,000, for a total cost of more than \$1.7 million.



You can't see the house from the street. It's out of sight, behind a no trespassing sign off Providence Road in Weddington, in the midst of 19 ¼ acres of dense woods. Furtick's name is not on the deed. Instead, it's under the name of the Jumper Drive Trust. The trustee: James "Chunks" Corbett, Elevation Church's executive pastor and Furtick's right hand man.

"The pastor should be the servant of his people. He should be the one that is most transparent," said Ole Anthony of the Trinity Foundation. "It saddens me to see what the church is becoming."

Anthony belongs to a small church in Dallas, Texas, and believes preachers should give up their big houses and get back to the Christian church's humble beginnings. "There, the pastors lived as the poorest of the poor, not the richest of the rich," he said.

NBC Charlotte wanted to ask Furtick about his multi-million dollar home. For weeks, we sent emails, made phone calls, sent letters, and even met with Furtick face-to-face. He refused to speak publicly until Saturday, September 29, when he responded in his sermon.

"I've been feeling sorry for myself because they tell me there's this news reporter trying to do this story where he wants to make our church look bad," Furtick said in his sermon. "Now me and [my wife] Holly, this year, we're building a house. We've been looking for a piece of land to build a house for our family for a long time. I'm real excited about it, but then I find out, this is crazy, the news is trying to fly this chopper over our house. I'm thinking to myself, first of all, it's not that great of a house. I'm sure there's better houses, if you've got to fly a chopper over somebody's house."

"It started to mess with me a little bit because I thought this ain't right. I didn't even build that house with money from the church. I built it with money from my books and I gave money to the church from the books and you start getting real defensive and being like this ain't right. This ain't right," Furtick said.

"I'm sorry, but there's something wrong with that," said Rosebrough, who runs a protest podcast against preacher profiteers from his home in suburban Indianapolis. "There's no distinction between Elevation Church and Steven's books. The two get mashed together in a way that creates a real conflict because the job of the pastor is not to preach his book."



Elevation Church paid for full page ads promoting the book, and paid to air sermons featuring the book on TV, including on NBC Charlotte. In a webcast, Furtick also gave away a backpack to a poor child for every sale of his book “Greater.”

Corbett told NBC Charlotte that “the books help the church tremendously” in three ways:

- First, Furtick arranges for the publisher to sell the books by the thousands to Elevation Church at his author’s discount. So, Elevation Church makes money on the book, but no one will say how much.
- Second, Furtick donates some of his own advance money to Elevation Church. Corbett says Furtick “is very generous,” although he won’t say much Furtick donates.
- Third, the publisher pays the church outright to produce slick videos marketing the book, although the church won’t say how much, all of which makes the church sound like a business.

“Is he not doing the exact same thing that the money changers were doing in the temple? Using God’s house to make a profit?” says Rosebrough. “Do you know what Jesus did? He made a cord of whips and drove those damn people out of God’s house. The church does not exist for this.”

How much did Furtick make from his books? No one will say how much. But he says the book of Steven paid for the house of Steven.

“I would also argue that it’s not exactly suffering for Jesus,” said Warren Cole Smith, an author from Charlotte and editor at The World, a Christian magazine. “That’s sort of the dirty little secret of these mega church pastors. They use this church as a platform and make a lot of money on the side.”



Yet, Elevation Church has asked volunteers and employees alike to sign a confidentiality agreement, which threatens to sue if volunteers and members disclose church finances. “If Steven Furtick's followers in the congregation at Elevation want to pay him these outlandish salaries and want to allow him to live in multi-million dollar homes, that's up to them," said Smith. "They're the ones contributing the money. But they should know that.”

Many churches believe at least elders or deacons should set the pastor's salary. But at Elevation, it's a closely guarded secret. Wednesday night at 6 p.m., the I-Team reports on the men who set Steven Furtick's salary. None of them are members of Elevation Church.